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CHINESE COMMUNIST NUCLEAR WEAPONS CAPABILITIES

1. Evidence on Communist China's nuclear weapons program is still insufficient to permit confident conclusions as to the likelihood of Chinese Communist nuclear detonation in the next few months. Peiping has made a remarkably heavy investment in advanced weapons facilities. We believe that Communist China's leaders are determined to set off a nuclear device at the earliest possible moment in order to secure military, psychological, and political advantages at home and abroad. We cannot rule out the possibility that the Chinese could set off their first nuclear device at any time. However, we have no convincing evidence that the Chinese are preparing now for an early test, nor can we establish that the Chinese have yet produced the fissionable material necessary for a nuclear device.

2. Clearly, the Chinese Communist leaders are diverting much of their limited scientific, technical, and economic resources to an ambitious advanced weapons program, including efforts to develop a missile delivery system of at least medium range.

3. Intelligence acquired [] (from overhead photography) in the past year suggests that facilities not previously seen or insufficiently advanced to permit classification may be parts of the nuclear weapons program. The most important are one near Lop Nor in Sinkiang, one near Koko Nor in Ch'ing-hai Province, and one near Yumen in Kanou Province. Some new intelligence has also been acquired concerning the major facilities previously identified with the Chinese Communist nuclear weapons program, particularly those near Lanchow and Pao-t'ou. []

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4. The most interesting installation found in the past year has been the tall tower and large circle near Lop Nor. These could be designed to play a part in either nuclear or, possibly, missile testing. Photography of 13 July 1964 shows a number of tents in the area, some new ditching, and paving under way on a 4,000 foot landing strip in the support area about 18 miles from the site. The evidence does not indicate that the Lop Nor facility is being pushed to completion for a test in the weeks or months immediately ahead.

5. The very large complex near Koko Nor may be connected with advanced weapons, judging by its remote location, the heavy security provisions, the facility's apparent incompatibility with Communist China's economic program, and a few tenuous associations with nuclear energy. The unfinished installation near Yemen, which has been under construction the past three years or so, has in recent photography shown characteristics which lead us to classify it as a possible nuclear reactor site, but it is clearly not far enough along to affect production capabilities in the next few months.

6. [] and other auxiliary facilities have progressed some in the past year at the gaseous diffusion plant near Lanchow. Construction there also appears to have begun on a second cascade building; the existing plant is only half as large as what would almost certainly be needed to produce weapon-grade U-235. Thus this facility does not contribute to present nuclear capabilities.

7. Additional construction has also taken place at the probable reactor facility at Pao-t'ou. This installation is the key one in calculations of Chinese Communist capability to detonate a plutonium weapon or device in the near future. We are now inclined to believe that it has in fact gone critical but that it did not do so before late 1963. It probably would be two years after criticality before enough plutonium would be produced for a first device. This analysis, which is compatible with our evidence on the state of advancement of all other aspects of the nuclear program, suggests that the odds are against the Chinese Communists' having the capability of detonating a nuclear device in the next few months.

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